

Sleepless in Sol Heumann

Administrators experience the 'challenge' of RIT residence life

Little sleep, lousy mattresses and a 5:20 a.m. fire alarm helped mark the first Real RIT: Dorm Challenge.

The Student Government-sponsored event challenged the RIT administration to a two-night, three-day immersion experience in the campus residence halls. Administrators roomed with students, parked in designated student parking lots and ate their meals at Gracie's, the dining facility in Grace Watson Hall.

Twenty administrators emerged from the challenge with a new understanding of the RIT student experience – both the good and the bad.

"Students seem to think that moving into the dorms was some brave act of charity on the part of administrators," says Rebecca Johnson, who participated in the challenge along with her husband, RIT President Bill Destler. "Administrators, on the other hand, seem to be grateful for having been invited to this experience and have left the dorm on a 'high' – albeit a tired one."

During an open forum at the end of the challenge, participants shared positive sentiments similar to Johnson's. However, the experience did not pass without some difficulties. A lack of sleep was a common theme.

"Sleeping in a dorm room is like being in Vegas," says Chief Information Officer Jeanne Casares. "You don't know what time it is or if it's light or dark out. Everyone is up all the time, moving about and hanging around. The lights are bright and the noise is continuous. I think I got about 27 minutes of sleep. Tiring, but fun!"

Those were exactly the types of experiences that Student Government wanted administrators to have.

"The next time administration has to make a decision that affects students, I'm sure they'll think of the time they spent in the residence halls," says Student Govern-



ment Vice President Matt Danna, one of the Dorm Challenge organizers.

Student Government's plan already appears to be working. During the open forum, Destler received the loudest cheer of the evening when he proclaimed his desire to convert lounge spaces back into true lounges (many lounges have been converted into student rooms). Vice President for Student Affairs Mary-Beth Cooper received a similar ovation when she stressed the need to provide more comfortable mattresses.

John Follaco

Above: Marian Nicoletti, center, director of transfer and senior associate director, undergraduate admissions, participates in a get-acquainted activity with students and other administrators.

Above right: RIT President Bill Destler checks out his new home with first-year student Moises 'Ozzy' Urratia, one of Destler's three roommates during the Dorm Challenge.

Right: Alan Hurwitz, president, NTID, poses with his roommates, from left, Joshua Maugh of Portland, Ore., Shon Lawrence from Columbus, Ga., and Zoh Qureshi from Niagara Falls, Ont.

From fire drills to Freshman 15

One administrator tells (almost) all

For the first time in nearly 25 years (gulp), I checked into a college dorm as part of Student Government's "Dorm Challenge" in January.

Let me introduce you to my roommates in Sol Heumann Hall, Room 7088:

- Moises "Ozzy" Urratia, a first-year new media design and imaging major from Saugerties, N.Y.
- Everett Carlisle, a first-year film production major from Amarillo, Texas.

• Bill Destler, who graduated a few years ago and ascended to the RIT presidency.

So how did I spend my three days in the dorm? Try adjusting to a 20-foot by 15-foot room with four loft-style beds. I consider myself a night owl, but I was reminded that college students typically go to bed between 1 and 3 a.m. on weeknights. The good news is that iPods have replaced booming stereos! Too bad technology hasn't cured snoring.

Besides the lack of

ZZZs, dorm life gave me a new appreciation for student life. It's really amazing to see the activity at night. It's like a buzzing city with hundreds of students walking the underground tunnels to events, clubs and other activities.

In terms of food, I found plenty of menu choices at Gracie's. The food was excellent, although the students swear it was because the administration was in the house. By the third day, I was starting to worry about the "freshmen 15"! My advice to the students: Grab some fruit to take back to your room.

I swear Student Government wanted the RIT administration to hoist up the white flag during the Challenge. But we never surrendered. But I have to admit I was close to throwing in the towel when the fire alarm went off at 5:20 a.m. This was an evacuation RIT style: piercing alarm, flashing strobe lights (to awaken the deaf community), and standing outside in 10-degree temperatures for 25 minutes. Along with President Destler, hundreds of students filed out of the eight-story co-ed building. We heard language that would make any sailor proud.

So what will be some of the outcomes of the Dorm Challenge? The administration will be working hard to improve such areas



Bob Finnerty '07 collects his orientation packet.

as overcrowding (making the lounges truly lounges again), wireless connection and bus schedules. Administrators agreed they would return next year. It would be nice to add the Dorm Challenge to the list of RIT traditions.

I learned so much about the people I work for – the students. The college experience is way more than what you learn in the classroom. It's about meeting diverse people from all over the world.

Sign me up for the next Challenge!

Bob Finnerty '07

RIT Chief Communications Officer

Web extra:

To read Finnerty's blog posts, visit www.rit.edu/news/blog



Web extra:

To read comments from Dorm Challenge participants, visit the Student Government blog at <http://sg.rit.edu/realrit>

What they said about dorm life

"Living in a quad can be described as cozy, warm (code: really warm) and not the same Serta that I have at home. I must tell you that Student Government was wise to have us do this. I understand a few issues a bit more clearly now."

Mary-Beth Cooper,
vice president, Student Affairs

"I moved into a former lounge converted into a quad with three roommates. In some ways, it still operates as a lounge – just with three people living there. Over the course of the evening, many from the floor stopped by to do homework, play video games or watch Hole, The Simpsons or Family Guy."

Jon Maurer, director, Global Risk Management Services Business Operations

"At 5 a.m., I woke up to get ready for my daily exercise – and all of a sudden, the strobe lights were flashing. Yeah, a fire alarm. We all had to walk down to outside. It was about a 30-minute wait. I found out it was due to food in a microwave oven."

Alan Hurwitz, president,
National Technical Institute for the Deaf

"SG's Real RIT Dorm Challenge was the best, most impactful program I have ever seen during my three years at RIT . . . perhaps in my entire career. I loved sharing the student experience first-hand. It was an honor."

Heath Boice-Pardee, associate vice president, Student Affairs